

Community Charge

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A Reflection on 1992

Given the terrible situation of exploitation, oppression and discrimination which the Native peoples continue to suffer, we must not conceive of the 500th anniversary as a triumphant and jubilant festival. On the contrary, we must turn this event into the beginning of a proper and profound reflection on this whole long stage of the history of our peoples and the reality we continue to face.

It is necessary to make a correct evaluation of the meaning of the 500th anniversary which takes into account our concrete situation and that of our peoples in general. In this way, we may create the condition, based on social justice, mutual respect, peace and cooperation for develop-

ment and national independence, which will mark the end of 500 years of oppression, discrimination, denigration, misery, hunger and repression.

We demand, then, respect and recognition of our rights to maintain and develop our identit-

ies. We denounce all attacks against us as individuals and as peoples. Let us call for attention to, and solidarity with, our struggle.

In order to find adequate solutions to our problems, let us propose methods of working in

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Assessing the Human Costs

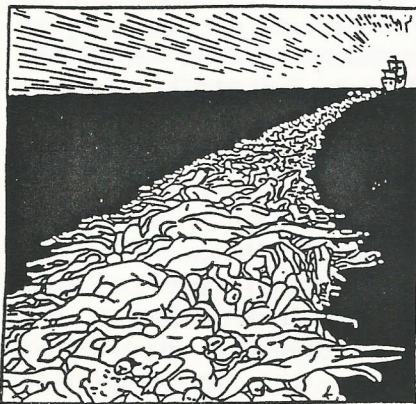
In the previous issue of Community Charge we discussed new government policies meant to restrict the number of refugees being admitted into Canada. The new restrictions can be noted in the recent increase of case denials, beginning in February of this year. This has been the government's response to a growing backlog of refugee claims. The Immigration Review Board is backlogged with 113,063 cases (as of February 22, 1991), accumulated over several years.

This huge backlog has forced many refugees to wait long

periods before receiving a ruling on their case. The emotional and psychological cost of lengthy waits has resulted in anxiety, insecurity (on their rulings) and depression among refugees. This has had tragic consequences.

As is the case of Jesus Seferino Aguilar, a young El Salvadorian man, who committed suicide on May 8th in Toronto. Mr. Aguilar had been waiting four unnecessary years for a decision on his claim. Coming alone to this country and having no relatives in Canada, Mr. Aguilar felt very isolated, and suffered

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Dam-age

With the attention given to the James Bay II and other dam projects being built, there is one project that has been overlooked and forgotten. The project is on the Churchill and Nelson River watersheds. The dams for this project were being built 15 years ago and continue to be built. The area effected by this dam is almost all of Northern Manitoba, and the dam is made up of generation stations with 11 more planned, 3 large dams and several diversion channels.

The idea of this project is to tap the massive hydro power of the 2 rivers. This is done by using the Missi Falls (see map), dam to redirect the water flow south through Southern Indian (S.I.) Lake into the Rat River and then into the Burntwood. Finally the water will end up going into the Nelson. The flow that is being turned back at Missi Falls is 900 cubic metres out of a total flow of 1,050. This has meant that the Churchill River past Missi Falls is becoming a dead river.

The damage caused by this diversion is massive both to the Natives of the area and to the environment. Water levels have been raised by 5 meters in S.I. Lake and the flow has dramatically increased. The water level and flow now thaw the permafrost which leads to large scale erosion and slumping of the shoreline. The erosion causes the



shoreline to lose and area of 40-50 metres a year and has led to water being murky and filled with sediment.

With erosion and flooding came high mercury levels in the lakes and rivers. Every year at spring thaw the ice breaks up and releases mercury that used to be dormant in the now eroded shorelines. This has meant that some Native fishing communities have dwindled, robbing them of part of their culture. Out of 45 fishing families in S.I. Lake only half a dozen remain. Such drastic changes have meant that the diet

of those living in S.I. Lake has had to change. For example in 1973, 75% of their food was from hunting and fishing, now with the dams and generators destroying the grounds that were fished and hunted, only 25% of the diet is from the area. The diet is now based on processed food from the south that costs more.

S.I. Lake is not the only community effected by the dams and generators. Cross Lake on the Nelson River system has lost close to 50 metres of lake in some places which has forced people there to fish at a lake 60 km.

HUMAN COSTS Continued

from severe depression and schizophrenia. Unfortunately, as a backlog case he was not able to sponsor his family back in El Salvador to come join him here, nor could leave to visit relatives in the U.S.. The combination of these factors played heavily on his tragic fate.

The government's new 'tough' measures are supposed to help end the backlog. The Review Board is doing this by systematically denying claims, but this is only creating more anxiety among refugee claimants. Such is the case of the De Leone family in Montreal, who were targetted for deportation back to their native Guatemala. In early May the family of six (including four young children), went underground out of fear for their lives if they were returned to Guatemala. The De Leone's are still in hiding and must now live with anxiety daily for the fear of being caught by immigration officials. On top of this is the stress of providing for their four young children.

The recent surge in case

denials, has demonstrated how claims are simply being fast tracked. This means refugees with



legitimate claims are not being given a fair hearing. Refugees can appeal to a federal appeals court if they feel they haven't received a fair hearing. But court appeals are now being turned down as frequent as claims.

Currently there is a case of an El Salvadorian couple in Toronto, Antonia Feures and Jose Alberto Garcia Estrada, who along with their two children are being deported. Jose was a former official for the Union of Industrial and Metal Workers of El Salvador (STIMES), he along with other union activists were beaten in the streets of San Salvador by government para-military forces, who later went to search his home and stabbed his wife Antonia. In their case hearing, these facts were never allowed to be properly brought forth before the review board. Too add to this, there was not adequate translator's provided. The couple has recently put in an appeal. If this is denied then their case will never be properly heard, and they will be sent out of this country like so many others, to uncertain fates.

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conjunction with the other popular sectors of Guatemala and our America.

Let us struggle for 1992 to be declared "THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF SOLIDARITY WITH THE STRUGGLE AND RESISTANCE OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES" and turn 1992 into a year of homage for the

indigenous leaders of Guatemala and the rest of America who have spilled their blood for liberty, social justice and peace.

The above article was reprinted from the Guatemalan Peasant Committee of the Highlands/CCDA (for more info. write to: 280

LineRidge Rd. W., Hamilton, Ont., L9C 2V2) Although the article stresses the situation in Guatemala and the struggle of their indigeonous peoples. We here at Community Charge feel it is a good analysis which stress the need to organise all our communities against this celebration of genocide.

Dam-age

Continued

away. Out of 17 commercial fishers in 1977 only 6 remain. Nelson House on Footprint Lake has seen the water levels raised by 6 metres submerging 1,200 hectares of land. This has led to high levels of mercury in the water and fish. They now also have to fish at other inland lakes.

Despite the damage already created, the construction of 11 more generating stations, 4 of them on the northern part of the Nelson alone, will go on. This would push production up to a total of 8,600 megawatts, of this Ontario will buy 1,00 megawatts for \$13.5 billion over 22 years, providing that the proposed Conawapa station is built and running by the year 2000. When the Limestone generator, starts producing in 1992, 500 of the 1,280 megawatts produced will be bought by Northern States Power Corp. of Minneapolis.

In 1989, Manitoba made a \$24 million profit from sales totalling \$66 million. Manitoba predicts that they will be receiving \$1.4 billion in revenue from the power stations in the year 2000 alone, with exports from that ringing in at \$320 million, of the total.

The continued construction of hydro-dam projects goes on not only Manitoba, but also in Keweenaw, B.C. and James Bay in Quebec.

These projects will have an equal or more damaging effect on the Native populations and the environment in those areas. Manitoba's political and business communities feel that the lives and culture of 12,000 Natives and Metis are not as important as providing power for the urban areas and factories. Already over 830 people in the Churchill--Nelson River area have been found to have a potential risk of mercury poisoning.

The culture of the area is also being effected. Youth are now preparing to leave the area because traditional ways of living are no longer viable, due to the destruction of wildlife. Despite attempts to bring in new jobs by building tourist lodges and jobs on the dams, unemployment and alcoholism are both on the rise.

As one Native resident said about the situation, "the government and hydro thought all they had to do was to give us some money, but money is soon gone."

We here at Community Charge are working on compiling an info. package about various hydro and diversion dam projects here in Canada. If you have any information you think we could use please send it. Thank-you.

Community Events



JUNE 28,29,30, JULY 1 - Earth-song. A celebration of culture, past and present. Dundurn Park. 4:00 P.M. - 10:30 P.M. June 28, 12:00 P.M. - 10:30 P.M. June 29,30 and July 1.

JULY 11,12,13,14 - First Annual Kanehsatake Spiritual Gathering, Kanehsatake Ancestral Pines, Mohawk Territory, Route 344 West from Montreal. Admission \$6/day, \$10 weekend, \$2 children, under 12 free. For more information call (514)-479-8321



COMMUNITY CHARGE covers local and international news from an anti-statist perspective. If you wish to contribute too, or receive this newsletter, please send an SASE to:

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